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A

Semi-Centennial Discourse

DELIVERED SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 1878,

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COMMEMORATIVE OF THE

Organization of the Congregational Church,

NEWMARKET, N. H.

By REV. ISAAC C. WHITE,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

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SERMON.

"*A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you.*"

LEV. XXV: 11.

THIS is our jubilee; and while we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of this church, we celebrate at least the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the first Congregational church in what was originally the town of Newmarket, incorporated in 1727, embracing not only what is now within the limits of the town, but also the town of South Newmarket. Tracing the history back as far as the records will carry us, we find that in 1730 Rev. John Moody was ordained and installed pastor of the Congregational church, in a meeting-house which stood a short distance south of the junction of the Boston and Maine, and Concord and Portsmouth Railroads. Mr. Moody continued pastor of the church for nearly half a century, his official relation to it being severed only by his death in 1778. Mr. Moody was succeeded by Rev. Seth Noble, during whose ministry in 1792 a new meeting-house, located a short distance north of the Junction, was built. Mr. Noble was succeeded by Rev. Nathaniel Ewer, Rev. Samuel Tombs, and Rev. James Thurston who closed his ministry here in 1808, and was the last minister installed as pastor of the church while located at the Junction. For a number

of years after, the pulpit was occupied by Rev. John Broadhead of the Methodist denomination, who was the last minister employed by the town. As the population tended away from the center toward the north and south parts of the town, the original church, threescore years ago, became almost extinct, and for a number of years had no apparent existence; but in 1840, it manifested its life at the south part of the town, where it still lives to do its heavenly work, and, though small, has before it a bright and prosperous future.

Threescore years ago, when the old church at the Junction was struggling for existence, almost overwhelmed with trials and difficulties, this village, with its present buildings, business and people, did not exist. Here and there, there is a dwelling which has stood for sixty years, and here and there, there is an individual who engaged in the activities of those times. No church edifice then lifted its spire heavenward, and rung out its call to worship from Sabbath to Sabbath, and no spacious school-house spoke of the inestimable value of knowledge, and invited to its acquisition. Then no iron horse, with sinews of steel, devouring fire and breathing smoke, thundered his way through this town, drawing the long and heavy train, freighted with intelligence and every kind of merchandise, to the seat of business and trade, and no telegraphic wire bore its varied messages with lightning speed along the gleaming track. Then the river, which is now chained and made the servant of man, flowed on in its own native freedom, and where the hum of machinery now fills the air, silence reigned, except as broken by the song of birds and the sound of the ship-builder's axe.

In 1823, the Newmarket Manufacturing Company laid the corner stone of their first mill. In 1825, the second mill was gradually rising on foundations which proved to be insecure, as the walls settled and cracked, when Mr. Timothy Chamberlain was called to superintend the work, who relaid the foundation, telling his men to dig to the bottom-ledge, and then there would be no more settling or cracking, if they piled up a dozen stories upon it; and under his skillful superintendence, the mill was built, and stands securely to-day, yielding the products of its industry for commerce.

To this man, and through him to the Tabernacle Church in Salem, Massachusetts, of which he was a member, and to the old church at the Junction, which, in ceasing to exist there, if it had not a single member to send here, did not fail to send to this village many, invisible indeed, but mighty moral and spiritual influences; to this man, and these influences, we are indebted for the commencement of the religious enterprise which gave birth to this church.

As Mr. Chamberlain saw, with the clear vision of a spiritually-minded man, the moral waste and desolation of the community, without regular Sabbath services, his religious feelings were moved, his spirit was stirred in him, as Paul's was when he beheld the city of Athens wholly given to idolatry; his purpose was formed, and he at once secured from the directors the privilege of occupying the second story of the warehouse, just north of the Town Hall, for religious meetings; where, on the first Sabbath, he conducted the services himself, reading a sermon from the words, "Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Jeremiah vi: 16.

But this did not satisfy the spiritual aspirations to which his regenerated nature and Christian culture had given birth. He felt the imperative need of a devoted minister of the gospel, to preach the saving truths of Revelation to the three hundred who assembled in the warehouse, and so he applied to Rev. Mr. Burt of Durham for a minister, at the same time putting his hand in his pocket, and drawing out forty dollars, saying, "We mechanics, with families to provide for, are seldom flush of cash, but you will please send us a preacher, and keep him at work as long as he can supply us, and when the funds are gone give me another chance."

Not long after, when the leaves of summer were beginning to fade and fall, and the forests were putting on their robes of beauty, on a bright Sabbath morning, a young man fresh in the work of the gospel ministry, overflowing with energy and full of zeal for the kingdom of Christ, sacrificing a doubly lucrative field for this, who was both preacher and teacher, being employed during the week at Phillips Exeter Academy, rode into this village, and preached the first sermon ever delivered in the warehouse, from the words, "And they all with one consent began to make excuse." Luke xiv: 18. This man was Rev. John P. Cleaveland, who was afterward settled as pastor of the Tabernacle Church in Salem, Massachusetts, and during his long and successful ministry, as pastor of several other prominent churches in the West, and who retained in an unusual degree his youthful vigor and activity, until five years ago he was suddenly stricken down with paralysis, which in a few weeks terminated in his death.

As he came into this village, on the first Sabbath morning of his ministry here, he was startled at the general desecration of the Sabbath which he beheld; but a large audience welcomed him at the warehouse, listened seriously and attentively to his earnest presentation of gospel truth, and sang admirably, being led by Mr. Chamberlain, who had for a long time been chorister of the choir of the Tabernacle Church in Salem, Massachusetts.

On the same Sabbath that Mr. Cleaveland first came to this village, to cast his net into the moral stream which flowed through this place, for the purpose of catching men, a fishing vessel came up the river from Portsmouth, and anchored just below the warehouse, and cast their nets into the river, and took a large draught of fish, estimated at twenty barrels.

Mr. Cleaveland's labors here were from the first attended with the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit, and during his ministry of three months a deep and abiding religious impression was made on the minds of the congregation, the full and happy results of which eternity alone will reveal.

In May, 1826, Mr. John Adams, son of Prof. Adams of Phillips Andover Academy, while on a visit to Exeter, where there was special religious interest, and where he assisted Mr. Cleaveland in conducting meetings, was providentially directed to this place, and for six weeks he labored among this people with great zeal and faithfulness, visiting from house to house, and assisting in establishing a Sabbath school, which was organized the 28th of May, with twenty-five or thirty scholars, five teachers, and the superintendent, Mr. Chamberlain. The teachers were Sarah Mead, Jane Kelley, Miss Young, Miss Haines, and Miss Murray,

and the books which they used were Watts's Catechism, and the Sunday School Speller. This was the commencement of the Congregational Sabbath school, which preceded the organization of the church nearly two years, and which was not without a decided and powerful influence in preparing the way for it.

The following September was a memorable month in Lamprey River Village, as it was then called, for the Lord visited it in great mercy, awakening an unusual religious interest, which constrained not a few to go to the inquiry meetings, conducted by Mr. Chamberlain and Rev. Mr. Burt, where they were assisted in their endeavors to become reconciled to God, and instructed in the Christian life; and as the young converts, in these meetings, related their experience, it deeply affected those who were anxiously inquiring what they must do to be saved; and one young lady, who left the meeting in despair, but saying, "I am willing to give up all for Christ," found herself reconciled to God before she reached her home; and such joy and gladness pervaded her whole being, that no sleep came to her eyes and no slumber to her eyelids that night, and it was with great difficulty she could refrain from waking her companions, and telling them what a precious Saviour she had found.

In the autumn of 1827 Mr. David Sanford, then a member of the Theological Seminary at Andover, visited this village on his way to Somersworth, where he labored as a missionary during his vacation, and the people expressed a strong desire to have him come and preach to them the unsearchable riches of the gospel, in the hall which Mr. Walter Smith was generously erecting for public worship. After giving the subject prayerful consideration and taking advice from

neighboring ministers, Mr. Sanford decided to come; and in the following January was approbated to preach by the Piscataqua Association at Kingston, and immediately commenced his ministry in the new hall, which stood on the corner of Maine and Central Streets, where the spacious store of Dr. Greene now stands.

The ministry of Mr. Sanford was immediately sealed with the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit, and crowned with an interesting revival, which prepared the way for the formation of a church, which fifty years ago on the 27th of March was regularly organized. The council, called to assist this church in its work of construction, and to welcome it to the fellowship of the Congregational churches, consisting of Rev. Messrs. Rowland, of Exeter, French, of North Hampton, Clary, of Dover, Hawes, of Great Falls, Jefferds, of Epping, and Cummings, of Stratham, assembled in the house of Mr. Walter Smith, and was organized by the choice of Rev. William F. Rowland, moderator, and Rev. Jacob Cummings, scribe.

After approving of the articles of faith and covenant proposed for adoption, and examining the candidates who desired to be formed into a church, the council proceeded to the place of worship, and with solemn and appropriate services, organized a church of eighteen members, seven bringing letters from other churches, and eleven making a public profession of their faith in Christ, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper being administered by Rev. William F. Rowland, and Rev. Joseph W. Clary and Rev. Jacob Cummings giving the charge and right hand of fellowship. Thus was this Congregational church, a half a century ago, regularly and solemnly organized, and commis-

sioned by the great Head of the Church, to faithfully and ceaselessly do its sublime work of love and mercy among the people of this community, receiving the divine approbation at the very outset, its organization services being the means of the conversion of one man, who became the senior deacon of the church. Not one of the clergymen who took part in the organization services, and not one of the eighteen members who constituted the church, is now living. They have all passed on to brighter scenes and nobler services, having fought a good fight, won a magnificent victory, and joined the church triumphant, amid the unspeakable glories of the celestial city. And yet they are not unconscious and disinterested witnesses of these exercises, but from their exalted position in glory they look down, with unspeakable satisfaction and delight, upon these humble services, which commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the church which they assisted in constituting, and of which they were the first members, and behold it, after having scattered its heavenly blessings most liberally through this community for fifty years, and after having battled with the powers of darkness successfully for half a century, stronger, better qualified, and more skillfully disciplined, than ever before, to overcome the enemy of all good, and to carry forward to completion the sublime work it is commissioned to perform.

The persons, of whom this church was originally composed, were at their own request constituted a Congregational church, with full power to receive members, choose their minister, and transact all necessary business, independent of any man, or body of men, or organization outside of themselves, amenable only to Christ, the great Head of the Church; and this

form of church government they believed to be the most Scriptural, and best fitted to develop the highest style of Christian character, and to extend that Kingdom against which the gates of hell cannot prevail, and which, in its triumphant progress, is to embrace all other kingdoms. This infant church, thus constituted, at once sought, in its own individual capacity, the settlement of a minister; and on the 22d of May an ecclesiastical council, composed of ministers and delegates from fourteen churches, at their request assembled at the house of A. P. Stinson, Esq., near the Junction, and organized by the choice of Rev. Huntington Porter as moderator, and Rev. Jacob Cummings as scribe. After approving of the action of the church, and examining the candidate, Mr. David Sanford, as to his doctrinal views, religious experience, motives in entering, and qualifications for the responsible work of the gospel ministry, the council formed a procession, and proceeded to the old church near by, with its square pews, high pulpit and sounding board above, and ordained and installed the first pastor and minister of this church and society; Rev. Israel W. Putnam, of Portsmouth, offering the introductory prayer, Rev. Mr. Beckwith, of Lowell, Massachusetts, preaching the sermon, Rev. William F. Rowland, of Exeter, offering the ordaining prayer, Rev. Mr. Pierson giving the right hand of fellowship, Rev. Jonathan French, of North Hampton, giving the charge to the pastor, Rev. Stephen Merrill, of Kittery Point, the address to the people, and Rev. Forest Jeffords, of Epping, offering the concluding prayer.

Now this church and society had a pastor and minister, ordained and installed, thoroughly furnished in mind and heart for the work of the ministry, young,

active, hopeful, and full of enthusiasm for the work to which he had received a divine call, and to which he had joyfully consecrated his life; and during the following summer and autumn, the church was strengthened and enlarged by the addition of thirty-two members, making its whole number fifty. This great prosperity made a demand for a larger and more commodious place of worship than the hall, and measures were immediately taken to build a meeting-house; and the structure in which we are now assembled, was erected, without, however, the steeple, and that part of the building on which it rests, without the vestry, and without this beautiful interior; but in its stead high square pews, a lofty gallery for the choir, and an enclosed pulpit, which the minister entered through a door on the side; and after ascending the stairs, found himself when standing, nearer the wall above than the audience below, and when sitting, entirely shut out from their view; and although unfinished, the contractors failing to complete the work at the specified time, it was dedicated to the worship of God, December 20, 1828, Rev. John P. Cleaveland, who preached the first sermon in the warehouse, preaching the dedicatory sermon from the words: "And they said, let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work." Nehemiah ii: 18.

During Mr. Sanford's ministry, which continued only two years and one month, there were added to the church, including the original members, sixty-one, only one of whom remains with us, and of the others, only one here and there continues a member of the church militant, nearly all having fought a good fight, finished their course, and kept the faith, have joined

the church triumphant, and received the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge has given them. In recounting the labors and influences which gave birth to this church, and nurtured and sustained it in its infancy, I should do my subject injustice if I did not make mention of Rev. Federal Burt, of Durham, Rev. Jacob Cummings, of Stratham, and Rev. Jonathan French, of North Hampton, as lending most valuable assistance, by their wise counsel, occasional preaching and deep interest; and of the New Hampshire Missionary Society, as giving most timely and indispensable pecuniary aid.

This church has had seven deacons, the first of whom is still warring a good warfare in the church militant, and through the goodness of a kind Providence unites with us in these semi-centennial services, while the four, Dea. Stacy, Dea. Palmer, Dea. Hayes and Dea. Elkins, who officiated between him and the present deacons, have been called to higher service, and to an exceeding great and unspeakably precious reward.

This church and society have called to their ministry thirteen pastors, five of whom, Rev. David Sanford, Rev. O. Tinker, Rev. J. Gunnison, Rev. George D. Blodgett and Rev. S. D. Bowker, have ceased from their labors, and their works do follow them; while seven ex-pastors, Rev. Constantine Blodgett, D. D., Rev. Thomas T. Richmond, Rev. S. S. N. Greeley, Rev. C. Chamberlain, Rev. Eliot C. Cogswell, Rev. James M. Palmer and Rev. Elias Chapman, still live to round out, complete, and fulfill their ministerial life and work, in this and other New England States, one of whom, whose ministry commenced here thirty years

ago, we are fortunate to have with us to-day, and you will all be delighted to hear.

During the twelve pastorates, which preceded the present, extending over a period of thirty-seven years, there were added to the church two hundred and sixty-four members. During the present pastorate, which extends over a period of nearly thirteen years, eighty-two have been added to the membership of the church, and this place of worship has been enlarged, remodeled, beautified, and furnished with a valuable organ, and the tower has been ornamented and made vocal, with a clock and bell, at an expense of $8,000.

But the influence of this church has not been limited to its membership, whom it has renewed, nurtured, and disciplined for Christian service, and for companionship with glorified spirits; for as yonder river has flowed through the natural scenery of this town, beautifying and enriching it, putting in motion the powerful, delicate and complicated machinery, which manufactures with wonderful skill valuable fabrics of commerce, and emptied into Great Bay, and then into the mighty ocean, whose waves have washed with it the most distant shores; so the influence of this church has flowed, a purifying, spiritual river, through the moral scenery of this community, beautifying and enriching it, and putting in motion the Christian activities which have restrained the sinful passions of men, renovated their hearts, strengthened every virtue, encouraged education and every laudable enterprise, purified, elevated and chastened public sentiment, and perfumed the whole moral atmosphere with a delightful Christian aroma, and emptied into the great Commonwealth, and then into the mighty ocean of life beyond, touching with a healing power,

not only the remotest corners of the earth, but adorning and enriching the celestial city with its jewels of grace.

I speak to men who know the value of a dollar, and can estimate the value of spiritual riches, and I carry with me the approval of your enlightened judgment when I say, that if all the expenditure which it has cost to sustain this church, and all the labor which it has put forth, during the fifty years of its history, had resulted in only the conversion and spiritual culture of one immortal mind, the salvation of that soul would more than compensate for all this expenditure and labor; placed in the balances they have not the weight of a feather by the side of the eternal well-being of the soul, created in the image of God, and destined to an endless existence; and could one of the many glorified spirits above, who have been nurtured and purified in this church, speak to us from his throne in glory, he would tell us that no human estimate of the value of the soul, however great, begins to come up to the reality.

The history of this church, only the sources of which I have touched, a volume being required to trace out and bring to view the myriad saving influences which it has sent out in all directions for half a century, should kindle and inspire in us all the most ardent and enduring love for it; not merely because it is a Congregational church, not merely because of the inestimably valuable work which it has performed, not for the gratification of any personal pride or ambition, but because it is a church of Christ, divinely instituted, and has a most sublime and holy mission in the earth, to glorify God in the salvation of men, for whom Christ died, and nurture and discipline

them to mingle with, and enjoy, the spotless society of heaven, grace and adorn the palace of the King of kings, and swell the song of redeeming love, which reverberates along the arches and corridors of that temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The time is coming when the Christian activities of the church will not only keep pace with, but be far in advance of all secular enterprises; and our love for Christ and this church, with which He has associated us, should so quicken our spiritual life, and so touch the springs of Christian activity within us, that we shall leave no measure unadopted, no prayer unoffered, no deed undone, no word unspoken, no wealth unexpended, which is needful to save every soul within the sphere of our influence, which it is possible to reach, and nurture and culture them for Christian service, and the kingdom of heaven. Our love for Christ and this church, which its history is fitted to inspire, and kindle into a glow, should constrain us to leave nothing undone to secure its present highest prosperity and greatest usefulness, and to send it on its future mission, completely furnished with every facility for doing successfully the sublime and heavenly work which Christ, the great Head of the Church, has commissioned it to perform.

We have unbounded occasion for the most devout thanksgiving and praise to God, that He has brought us, by means of timely liberality, prudence, and forecast, to this our jubilee year, under such encouraging and favorable auspices, with such a bright and hopeful future dawning upon us; that while so many churches, in this time of general depression in all business enterprises, are crushed beneath a heavy burden of accumulated debt, we owe no man anything but love;

that we have attained and occupy a most enviable position, by holding fast to those divine principles which, if they do not give present apparent prosperity, are the foundation of all true greatness and permanent success, and to which this pulpit has always given prominence; and that we have associated with us so many whose hearts glow with love to Christ and His kingdom, whose purposes of fidelity to Him are steel, and whose attachment to the ordinances of the gospel as here administered is as enduring as life itself.

All glory, on this our jubilee, to the King of kings, whose grace instituted this church fifty years ago, and has sustained and prospered it during all its history, and crowns it on this joyous anniversary with His divine blessing and benediction.